

Dear friends and neighbors,

The Legislature adjourned March 13, and it is wonderful to be back home again. We had several huge successes during the 60-day session.

As you probably heard, the gang bill was signed into law by the governor. While it's not everything I hoped for, it's a great start and I'll be just as passionate next year to continue the work we started. I want to thank each of you for sharing your stories with the task force and me. Your concerns and experiences are at the forefront of my mind as I work with my colleagues in Olympia.

The eluding bill, named the Guillermo 'Bobby' Aguilar and Edgar F. Trevino-Mendoza Public Safety Act of 2008, also passed the Legislature this year. This measure is important to our community. It also means that the legacy of these young men will live on, and hopefully prevent future innocent deaths.

In other news, I have been appointed to the Organized Crime Advisory Board. This committee, made up of legislators, attorneys, law enforcement officials and prosecutors, will meet regularly to discuss and review organized crime activities in the state, and make recommendations to the governor.

I voted on more than 600 bills this year, making it a busy session. I want you to know that your input throughout the year helped me make decisions and helped me in my discussions with other legislators.

I recently hosted a town hall by phone – more than 2,000 of you participated, and I answered about 20 questions during the hour-long call. It was a great success and it was good to hear what is important to you. Please continue to contact me with your questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Charles Ross



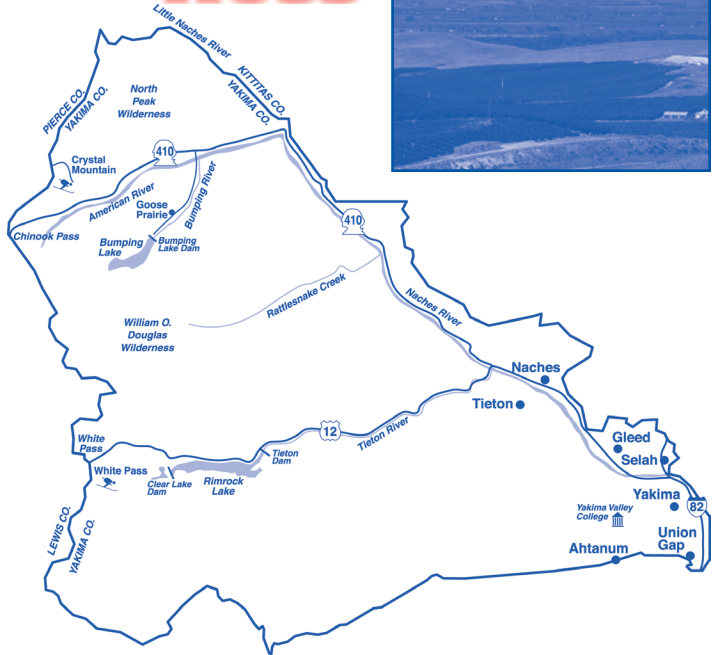
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THE ANTI-GANG BILL



This year’s gang bill (House Bill 2712) was a big win for the Yakima Valley and the entire state. The intent of the original bill was to use a three-pronged approach to deal with gang violence: suppression, intervention and prevention. What we saw signed into law was not exactly what we had in mind, but the important thing is that we have a foundation to work from in the coming years.

DEFINING GANGS

We all know the difference between the Girl Scouts and the Elks and the Bloods and the Crips, but many local communities had a difficult time putting these differences into words. The new law will define gangs, gang members and gang crimes. This is important for law enforcement officers and prosecutors when they determine a suspect’s threat to the community.

GANG DATABASE

We now have a way to let the Yakima police know the person they just arrested is a Seattle gang member. The legislation creates a database that will allow police to share information with other agencies around the state so they know with whom they are dealing.

INCREASED SENTENCING

One trend we see is gang members recruiting young children. This provision will increase sentences for adults who coerce minors to commit crimes. With some elementary school-aged children getting involved in gangs, this measure is important because it punishes the masterminds behind the crimes.

FUNDING

The state’s supplemental operating budget will spend about \$1.2 million to help fight gangs. The money will be used for several efforts, including grants for law enforcement efforts that target gang violence. A graffiti tagging removal grant program and a temporary witness assistance program will also receive funding. In addition, the Department of Corrections will study how we can reduce gang membership in prison populations. I’ll be looking for continued funding from the state to combat gangs in a variety of ways.

FUTURE WORK

I was disappointed to see the civil anti-gang injunctions removed from the bill. We worked very hard with citizens, legislators, attorneys and the American Civil Liberties Union to ensure the appropriate precautions were in place to protect civil liberties while creating something that could be effectively used by communities. My dedication is unwavering to making sure this important component of the gang bill is included in next year’s legislation.

POLICE DRUG TESTING

Recently, we’ve seen a disagreement between the law enforcement union and the City of Yakima over the issue of mandatory drug testing of police officers. I believe this is an issue of public trust.

That’s why I introduced a bill that would allow mandatory drug testing of law enforcement officers, but only if voters approve of the testing. Unfortunately, the proposal died because of the short session, but I hope to reintroduce the bill next year. Those we entrust with our safety and our lives should be clean and sober while they are protecting us.

ELUDING THE POLICE

As you might recall, the first piece of legislation I sponsored as your representative was a measure to increase penalties for those who elude the police. Unfortunately, it died in the Senate last year.

Since then, my colleagues and I have worked to address concerns while still keeping the original intent. This year, the bill passed the Legislature overwhelmingly. Starting June 12 of this year, anyone proven to put the public in danger by eluding the police will be guaranteed a year and a day in jail.



Rep. Charles Ross and the Aguilar and Trevino-Mendoza families look on as Gov. Christine Gregoire signs the Guillermo ‘Bobby’ Aguilar and Edgar F. Trevino-Mendoza Public Safety Act of 2008, also known as the felony eluding bill. March 28, 2008.

CAPITAL BUDGET PROJECTS

The capital budget, also called the “brick and mortar” budget, pays for the construction of school buildings, art centers and public works projects. In this year’s budget, our district will benefit immensely from the following projects:

Yakima Valley Community College Skills Center	\$2.5 million
Rattlesnake Hills Working Rangelands	\$576,000
Naches Depot and Trail Phase II	\$375,000
East Yakima Early Learning Center	\$100,000
Yakima Valley Museum Feasibility Study - Downtown Arts Center	\$25,000

STATE SPENDING

One of the astounding things we learned from the telephone town hall is how you feel about state spending. With a budget shortfall expected for the next two years, 80 percent of 115 people polled said they would prefer the Legislature address this shortfall by cutting programs, rather than raising taxes.

This year’s supplemental budget continued to spend your tax dollars on new programs, rather than saving enough for the leaner years we expect. I voted ‘no’ on this budget because I felt it does not prioritize the state’s needs very well. If you or I thought we might have financial problems next year, we would reduce our spending and start saving today. The state should set an example and do the same.

